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Latin Rebels Said to Get Missiles

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TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, Dec. 12 — A Nicaraguan rebel leader said this week that the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest of the groups trying to overthrow the Government in Managua, had obtained "about 20" portable SA-7 antiaircraft missiles, which he said were purchased this year.

Aristides Sánchez, a member of the directorate of the Democratic Force, said in an interview here on Monday that his forces had suffered heavy casualties in several encounters with Soviet-built attack helicopters.

But he said said the insurgents' acquisition of the SA-7's, which are also of Soviet manufacture, had made them optimistic about their ability to defend themselves against the attack helicopters, known as MI-24's.

Last Thursday, American officials confirmed a report that the Democratic Force shot down a Soviet-built helicopter with an SA-7 missile on Dec. 2, killing 14 military personnel aboard. It is believed to be the first use of such missiles in the Western Hemisphere.

The Nicaraguan Government charged that the rebels had acquired the missiles from the Central Intelligence Agency.

Rebel leaders have said previously that they bought the SA-7's on the international arms market with money donated by individuals in Europe and Latin America. They have denied that any of their missiles were provided by or manufactured in the United States.

Adolfo Calero Portocarrero, the leader of the Democratic Force, who has been primarily responsible for arms acquisition since Congress ended aid by the C.I.A. last year, said he would not identify the country through which he bought the missiles.

Mr. Sánchez, countering American and Sandinista statements, said the helicopter shot down Dec. 2 was thought to be an MI-24. He said another helicopter, thought to be an MI-8 transport, was damaged in the incident. The Sandinista Army said one helicopter, an MI-8 transport, had been destroyed.

Mr. Sánchez repeated rebel and American assertions that two of the 14 killed on the copter were Cubans, the pilot and co-pilot. Nicaragua has said all 14 were Nicaraguan soldiers.

Mr. Sánchez said conventional automatic weapons were ineffective against the MI-24's, which carry advanced weapons and electronic tracking systems. The Sandinista Army is said to have received six MI-24's and to have at least a dozen MI-8's.

After the Soviet-built, shoulder-held missiles were acquired, Mr. Sánchez said, two courses were organized to train about 50 rebels to fire them. He described the first group of trainers as Europeans without further identifying them, and the second group as Nicaraguans who had taken the first course.

Mr. Calero said the first group of trainers were men with experience in the guerrilla war in Angola.